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# 'Liberation theology' is big issue as UCC meets

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AMES, Iowa — A majority of the delegates at the 15th biennial United Church of Christ convention here appear to favor controversial "liberation theology" proposals, but the real test will come Tuesday when they decide whether to make those proposals official church policy.

Before the official opening of the convention yesterday, the 725 delegates heard denominational leaders speak on U.S. policy in Central America.

The United States' foreign policy is a particularly poignant issue for the United Church members because of their own involvement in liberation theology, which encourages resistance among groups that consider themselves oppressed.

Since liberation theology is compatible with some aspects of Marxism, the church is supportive of the Sandinista government in Nicaragua and is opposed to the United States' support of the resistance fighters, or Contras.

The convention, which ends Tuesday, will set church policy on U.S. actions in Central America and South Africa, and on economic and social issues in the United States.

Ricardo Espinoza, a counselor in the Nicaraguan Embassy, and Adis Vila from the State Department's Office of Inter-American Affairs, will present opposing sides of the issue to the delegates before the policy vote.

One proposal, submitted by the United Church for Board Ministries, calls for the president of the United States to reinstate bilateral negotiations with Nicaragua, withdraw vetoes of multilateral loans, abide by World Court rulings, stop covert or overt aid to the Contras, and to use his office to support the peacemaking efforts of the Contadora countries."

Delegates are expected to approve this non-binding proposal, which would thus become church policy. Individual churches can be encouraged, but not forced, to accept and promote official church policies.

In a congregational denomination like the United Church of Christ, dissenting churches can affect policy by refusing to give money to specific programs.

The Rev. Leonardo Boff, a leading proponent of liberation theology, has described its goal as the realization of the "kingdom of God on Earth, a kingdom consisting of perfect justice, fraternity and peace." He was recently censored by the Roman Catholics because his views "endanger the sound doctrine of the faith."

This definition of a kingdom of God accessible through human effort worries orthodox United Church of Christ members because, in practice, liberation theologians are supportive of some aspects of Marxism.